

IMPROVING RADIO DISCIPLINE

COMMUNICATING SIZEUP EXERCISE

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to provide all wildland fire personnel the opportunity to improve radio discipline and basic communication skills.

Training Objectives

Given a scenario, radio operators will gather the necessary information to verbally communicate a sizeup to dispatch utilizing proper radio discipline as identified on the “Radio Discipline Evaluation Form.”

Additional Information

This exercise uses the “Sizeup to Dispatch/Local Initial Attack” tactical decision game located in the Tactical Decision Games (TDGs) Library (under the “Initial Attack” drop-down menus) on the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program website located at http://www.fireleadership.gov/toolbox/TDG_Library/thelibrary.htm. The focus of this exercise, however, is more on the radio operators’ efficiency and effectiveness and less on the tactical decision emphasis of the game. Although the radio operator is in the hot seat, the radio discipline evaluators will gain benefits through observation and evaluation.

The “Radio Discipline Evaluation Form” and exercise format can be utilized with any TDG or training scenario. Evaluators are not active participants in any game or exercise and should not cause a distraction. Adding this evaluation tool to other training exercises encourages wildland firefighters to continually practice their communication skills at all times, resulting in safer and more efficient fire operations.

Three radio discipline evaluators are recommended; however, any number will suffice. As wildland fire personnel improve, evaluators should instinctively know what constitutes proper radio discipline and rely less upon the form during the evaluation process.

Resources/Materials Needed for this Exercise

- Facilitator
- TDG role players
 - ~ Engine Captain
 - ~ Dispatcher (unlike the TDG this may or may not be the Facilitator)
 - ~ Other role players (crewmembers, lookout) as necessary
- Radio discipline evaluators (three is recommended)
- Radio Discipline Evaluation Form
- Handheld radio, walkie talkie, or other radio prop for each radio operator
- Sizeup to Dispatch/Local Initial Attack TDG and associated needs
- Sand table (optional)

Task Set – Facilitator

- Inform all participants that they should come to the exercise prepared with the tools to perform their duties (paper, pens, IRPG, etc.).
- Review the exercise objective and Radio Discipline Evaluation Form with all participants.
- Notify radio discipline operators which participant(s) to evaluate.
- Review task sets with participants.
- Utilize inputs from the TDG, or make up your own, to add complexity to the exercise.
- If you are acting in the Dispatcher role, exhibit proper radio discipline.
- Provide the Engine Captain with the incident map or sand table
- Facilitate the exercise feedback session and TDG AAR.
 - ~ Feedback questions:
 - How was each player’s “presence” on the radio?
 - How could each player shorten their transmission?
 - What barriers did the players experience that prevented good communication?
 - How did the players prepare themselves for the radio transmission?

Task Set – Engine Captain

- After you have heard the scenario, take three (3) minutes to assess the situation and prepare your message(s).
- Once the three minutes are up, communicate your message(s) to the appropriate contacts.

Task Set – Radio Discipline Evaluator(s)

- Review the Radio Discipline Evaluation Form.
 - ~ Select one section to evaluate.
 - ~ Note there is a place to provide remarks about the items being evaluated. Use additional paper if needed.
- Using the Radio Discipline Evaluation Form, evaluate the radio operator(s) identified by the Facilitator as they communicate to the appropriate contact(s).
- After the exercise is completed, provide constructive feedback to the radio operator(s).

Initial Facilitator Information – NOT TO BE SHARED WITH STUDENTS

Title: Size-Up to Dispatch / Local Initial Attack

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Target Audience:

Single Resource Boss, IC Type 4

Training Objective:

Given the following scenario, the players will gather necessary information to provide a report of conditions during initial attack. Players should verbally communicate their decisions to the appropriate individuals.

Resources Referenced:

- **1 Engine Captain (Player Role)**
- 2 Engines (Engines 21 and 22)
- 1 Dispatcher
- 1 Chief Officer (e.g., AFMO, etc.)
- 1 Lookout

SCENARIO INFORMATION TO BE SHARED WITH STUDENTS

Facilitator Briefing to Students:

You are the Engine Captain on a Type 3 Engine (Engine 21). There are two crewmembers assigned to you. You are responding to an initial attack fire that was called in by a lookout located south of the fire at 1530. The initial reported was a small column with blue gray smoke in Pickle Canyon. It is a hot August afternoon and recent fire activity has catered to large fire growth. As you travel to the fire, you note the weather and fuel conditions (Select: Local RH, temperature, wind direction/speed for August at high to extreme indices). Pickle Canyon Road is a through road and resources may be responding from either end. There are multiple resources responding to your fire. They include two Type 6 engines, four Type 3 engines, and one Type 2 crew. Air resources are available if needed.

As you arrive on scene there is a ridge between you and the fire. The fire is currently putting up a dark column and seems to be building. From the road fuel model appears to be a mixed age group of Ponderosa Pine with light grass understory.

In three (3) minutes assess the situation, prepare, and then communicate to contacts you think are necessary.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR FACILITATOR ONLY

Facilitator “Murphy’s Law” Suggestions:

The “Murphy’s Law” suggestions listed below can be added as “What ifs” at any time during the scenario to raise the stress level of the leader. You can also use one of your own.

- Wind direction change
- Spotting
- Flat tire on incoming resource
- Radio traffic is overridden by an incoming resource getting directions to the fire (engine, chief officer, etc.)
- Land owner bothering player during sizeup.
- Resources are arriving and wanting assignments, briefing, and direction.

Facilitator’s Notes:

This TDGS should focus on initial attack sizeup and proper report on conditions to dispatch based on IRPG and local protocols. The facilitator will need to drive the scenario as the IA dispatcher. The player is presented with a medium response to an initial attack fire. The facilitator can adjust the number of resources responding to better reflect normal local response. The facilitator needs to create barriers to hinder the size-up process with the Murphy’s Laws.

The player’s priority should be establishing situational awareness and the assessing the complexity of the situation to deliver a good size up. NOTE: The player is unable to see the base of the fire and determine an exact size of the fire. The facilitator will need to describe the smoke column to give the player a feel for fire size.

The player should gather appropriate information based on the uncertainty of fire location and unknown fire behavior. The decision point begins when the facilitator hands the player his “piece” and the player decides how to enter the canyon and begin the sizeup.

In the TDGS the player’s actual sizeup is less important than the ability to communicate and their focus on gathering the information for the sizeup while overcoming outside barriers. The AAR should focus on “why” the player made the choices they made in giving the sizeup. Once the why has been confirmed the discussion can move to the “how”?

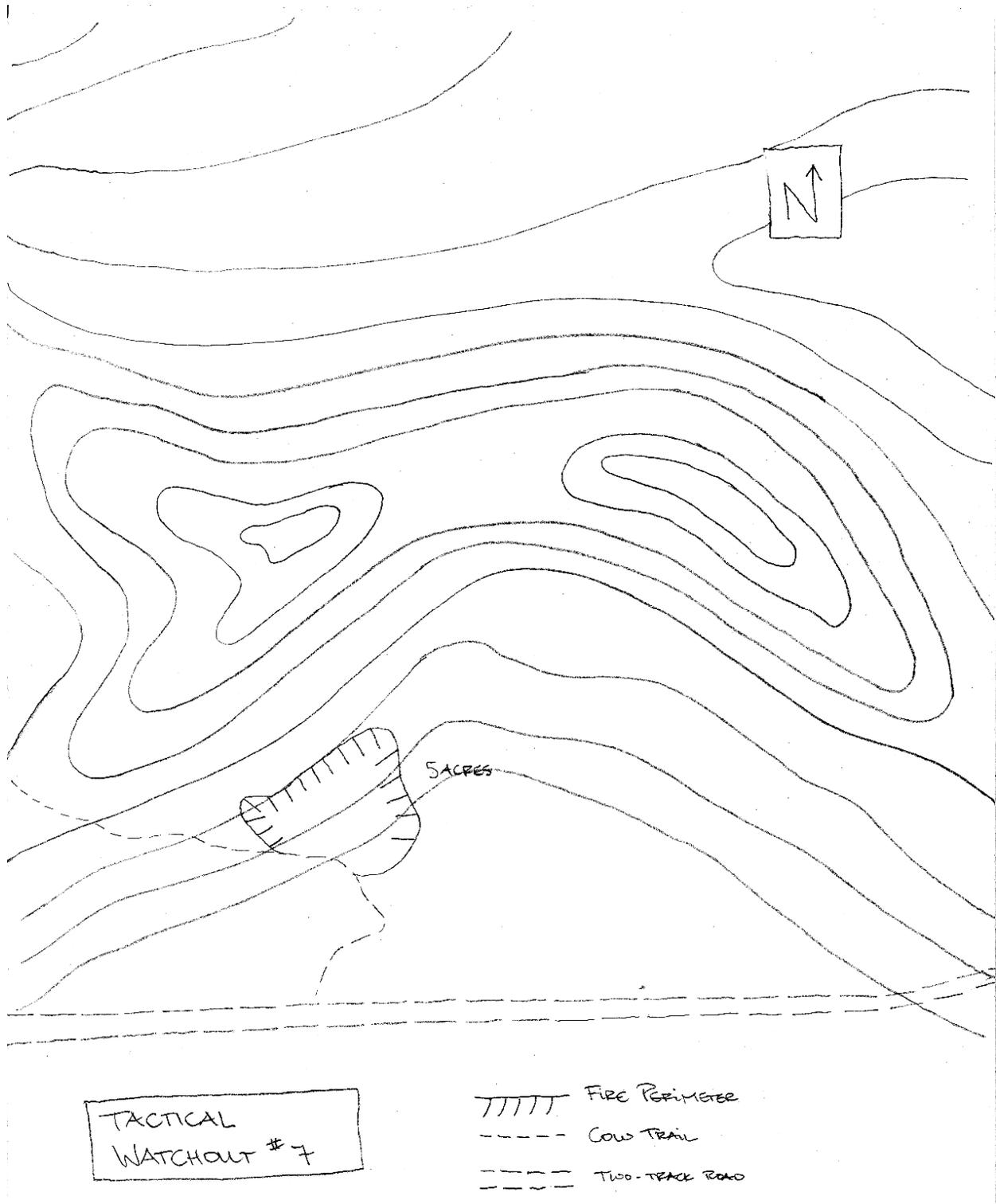
- How did the “outside” barriers affect your sizeup?
- How did you handle the missing information for the sizeup?
- Why did you establish the ICP/location for arriving location?
- Did the incoming resource have a good “picture” of the fire prior to arrival?

After Action Review:

Conduct an AAR with focus on the training objective. Use the AAR format found in the Incident Response Pocket Guide to facilitate the AAR. There are four basic questions in the AAR.

1. What was planned?
2. What actually happened?
3. Why did it happen?
4. What can we do the next time?

TDGS shouldn't have a single solution, keep the focus of the AAR on what was done and why.



RADIO DISCIPLINE EVALUATION FORM

COMMUNICATION BASICS (Radio Discipline Evaluator #1)

- Avoided excessive calling and unofficial transmissions.
- Utilized face-to-face communication as a better alternative (sender and receiver are located a short distance from one another; conferring about strategic or tactical options; complex, vital message must be conveyed).
- Practiced active listening techniques.
 - Gave the speaker his/her undivided attention.
 - Kept their mind focused on the topic.
 - Allowed the speaker to finish before they spoke.
 - Absorbed the message before he/she responded.
 - Listened for main ideas.
 - Asked questions.
 - Gave feedback.

Remarks:

TRANSMITTING THE MESSAGE (Radio Discipline Evaluator #2)

- Thought first; then spoke.
 - Used location identifiers (Division B, Drop Point 2, Helibase) or functional titles (Taskforce Leader, Medic, Operations)
- Kept messages short and simple.
 - Tried **not** to pack 5 seconds worth of information into 30 seconds.
 - Did **not** use big words when a short one would do.
 - Left out unnecessary words (e.g., ah, yeah, uh, you know)
- Used the phonetic alphabet (A – Alpha, B – Bravo, C – Charlie).
- Used plain English or “clear text.”
 - Avoided using codes.
- Used standard expressions (procedure words or pro-words such as go ahead, copy, affirmative, standby, over and disregard) to reduce the amount of time transmitting on frequencies and to reduce confusion.

Remarks:

TRANSMITTING THE MESSAGE (Radio Discipline Evaluator #3)

- Answered all calls without delay.
- Listened before they transmitted to make sure no one else was transmitting.
- When ready to transmit, pushed the transmission key and waited a couple seconds before speaking. When finished transmitting, waited before releasing the transmission key.
- Kept a distance of about 5 cm between the microphone and their lips, and shielded the microphone from background noises.
- Used good speech technique.
 - **R**hythm - Spoke in short sentences with a natural rhythm.
 - **S**peed - Spoke slightly slower than normal conversation.
 - ◇ Spoke at a rate of 150 words/minute.
 - ◇ Spoke even slower when someone needed to write down information.
 - ◆ **V**olume - Used normal speaking volume.
 - ◆ **P**itch - Spoke in a pitch slightly higher than normal conversation.
 - ◇ Remained calm.
- Divided long messages into sensible phrases, pausing every now and then.
 - Ensured that the person on the other end was copying the transmission.
 - Allowed others to break in with more important information.
- Did **not** read everything back.
 - Used "Say again" for the transmission they did **not** copy.
 - Used "copy," "over," and "stand by" for the next transmission if they understood the transmission.

Remarks: